TL1430-19

HOBART EAST TIMOR COMMITTEE

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Petition presented to the Special Committee of 24.

Mr Chairman,

Respected Members of this Committee,

Thankyou for this opportunity to again be present at these hearings on East Timor. We have also come to the United Nations for the past two years in the belief that the East Timorese people are entitled to all the support it is possible for a small group such as ours to provide.

As you will be aware, the situation of the East Timorese people remains unchanged, despite the good offices of the U.N. Secretary-General in attempting to bring 'all parties to the dispute' into dialogue as a first step towards achieving a just and peaceful solution. East Timor remains a de jure Portuguese colony with a de facto Indonesian colonial administration. Indonesia has consistently refused to enter into any talks involving representatives of the East Timorese people. The Portuguese government remains ambivalent and apathetic in its support for the rights of the East Timorese people, the majority of whom are Portuguese citizens. Thus the firm support provided by the United Nations is vital if Indonesia's illegal occupation is to be brought to an end and the East Timorese people permitted to exercise their right to self-determination and independence.

The many aspects of human rights abuses, dispossession and cultural genocide which Indonesia has imposed have been well documented in this room and, regrettably, there is no sign of a change in Indonesian policy. Any government which promotes and condones such terrible human rights abuses as the rape of little children, the burning of prisoners, the throwing of people from helicopters in flight, an all-inclusive forced

birth-control programme, the censorship of all communications, the dispossession of hundreds of thousands of people and the systematic destruction of a rich and unique culture, shames its own citizens and the generations to come.

But rather than dwell on the very grim picture which the Indonesian occupation of East Timor presents, we would like to draw your attention to what we see as several signs of hope for the future.

Firstly, there are now East Timorese support groups around the world in places as dispersed as Hong Kong, Sweden, Canada, New Zealand, Spain and Japan. Each time a group of people becomes aware of the situation in East Timor they are helping to ensure that the fundamental rights of the East Timorese people can never be forgotten or ignored.

Secondly, there is a small but growing amount of fraternization between Indonesian troops and the Fretilin independence fighters within East Timor which is gradually leading to greater understanding among young Indonesian servicemen of the rights and aspirations of the people of East Timor. We hope a time will come when young Indonesian men of integrity will refuse to fight their government's illegal and unjust war.

Thirdly, there are a number of inspiring international initiatives - such as the first Asia-Pacific Consultation on East Timor held in the Philippines last November, the recent Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry held in Portugal and attended by parliamentarians from Britain, Japan, Holland, Australia and Portugal, and the current seminar being held in Papua New Guinea. Such initiatives which bring together people of widely-divergent religious and political backgrounds and which disseminate information and understanding are extremely valuable.

Fourthly, there is a small but increasing degree of sympathy within Indonesia for the people of East Timor which is manifest both in the willingness of Indonesians to admit that East Timor is a colony and in the small clandestine independence-orientated groups which now exist in the areas of Indonesia neighbouring East Timor. Whilst the future of Indonesia is not the concern of this Committee, the growing awareness of the damaging impact of militarisation, the knowledge that the Indonesian war-machine is not invincible and the understanding that Indonesia's military

spending diverts funds from Indonesia's millions of poverty-stricken people, all impinge on Indonesian thinking and therefore on Indonesia's future.

Fifthly, there is the on-going support of the United Nations which has seen East Timor re-instated on the U.N. Human Rights agenda in Geneva and the continuing efforts of Mr Perez de Cuellar. We note the input of this 'Special Committee of 24' and the valuable opportunity you provide to inform U.N. members of the situation of the East Timorese people. We hope you will remain firm in your support until such time as the people of East Timor are able to take up their desired role as an independent nation.

Sixthly, there is the continuing close co-operation and commitment to working for independence by East Timor's two largest political groupings, the Timorese Democratic Union (UDT) and the Revolutionary Front of Independent East Timor (Fretilin). As you will know, both political parties are outlawed by Indonesia within East Timor, but they remain active with the support of the majority of East Timor's people.

Seventhly, there is the point which whilst not regarded as good news in Jakarta may bring Indonesia's military occupation of East Timor to an end and that is the growing indebtedness of the Indonesian nation. This year, approximately 36% of Indonesia's national budget is derived from foreign aid and loans. Military expansionism is expensive. As well as its 13 year long efforts to subjugate East Timor, Indonesia has been fighting the Free Papua Movement (OPM) in West Papua/Irian Jaya for 25 years and the Islamic Liberation front in Aceh/North Sumatra periodically. The Indonesian politicians and generals who have promoted invasion, occupation and armed conflict rather than dialogue, understanding and co-operation have done so without reference to the best interests of the Indonesian people. But when Indonesia sits down at the negotiating table it seems more likely that it will be for reasons of economics rather than reasons of justice or integrity.

We would also note that Indonesia's expensive world-wide lobbying campaign designed to remove East Timor from all U.N. agendas raises serious questions about Indonesia's commitment to the principles of the U.N. Charter which commits signatory nations to resolving conflicts by peaceful means.

A phased Indonesian withdrawal, with an interim Portuguese administration passing control to an elected East Timorese

government is in everyone's best interests, but most of all the people who are the primary concern of this Committee - the people of East Timor.

Thankyou.

This petition was presented by Mr Andrew Wells on behalf of the Hobart East Timor Committee.